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COUNTDOWN CALENDAR

2 This application claims the priority of U.S.
3 Provisional Application No. 60/416,631, filed October
4 7, 2002.

5 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION AND RELATED ART

6 The present invention relates to countdown or
7 advent type calendars corresponding to a selected time
8 interval having a beginning date, an end date and a
9 pictorial design and/or textural message relating to a
10 theme associated with the time interval. The calendar
11 may have any selected theme such as a recognized
12 holiday or an arbitrarily designated time interval
13 relating to events having a personal or familial
14 significance such as a birthday, wedding, anniversary,
15 vacation or the like.

16 The countdown calendars of interest herein track
17 the arrival of a date. The calendars are particularly
18 enjoyed by children as a means to quantify the time
19 interval to the approaching event date and to heighten
20 the anticipation of the event.

21 It is known to provide a date array with pocketed
22 date locations for insertion of a marker element or
23 separate mounting locations for numbered marker
24 elements as taught in U.S. patent 4,975,061. Removal
25 of marker elements from the date array during the
26 countdown may reveal a personal message as taught in
27 U.S. patent 6,186,553. Instead of removing marker
28 elements, tabs may be arranged to be opened
29 along fold lines to reveal a series of messages
30 associated with the upcoming event as taught in U.S.
31 patents 5,443,288 and 6,280,200.

1 Communication and educational calendars may enable
2 a user to write a personal reminder message under a
3 movable tab as in U.S. patent 2,831,278, receive a
4 specific health or behavior modification message
5 related to a goal as in U.S. patent 5,207,580, or
6 disclose an inspirational or motivational message on
7 movable tabs assembled to highlight or form a pictorial
8 design as taught in U.S. patent 5,090,733.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

10 In accordance with the invention, a countdown
11 calendar for a selected event is enhanced by the
12 concurrent provision of a text message and completion
13 or modification of a pictorial design during the
14 quantification of the time interval preceding the
15 event. The sequential indication of date during the
16 countdown provides for the development of the text
17 message and design.

18 In an illustrated embodiment, the sequential
19 indication of the countdown date reveals a text message
20 or greeting relating to the event and completes or
21 modifies an associated pictorial design or forms a
22 second text message.

23 To that end, date marker elements moved during the
24 countdown progressively reveal the letters forming a
25 text message. As the marker elements are moved during
26 the countdown, they are repositioned to complete a
27 design. The marker elements may bear portions of a
28 more comprehensive design or may comprise individual
29 features of the more comprehensive design. The marker
30 elements may be coded to fix their position upon
31 movement.

1 The calendar includes a support substrate having a
2 date location which may include a date array and a
3 target location which may include a pictorial design
4 and/or coded target locations for repositioning of
5 marker elements.

6 The marker elements may be temporarily mounted to
7 or removably secured to the substrate at the date
8 location and target locations using any convenient
9 method of attachment. For example, the marker elements
10 may be temporarily mounted or removably secured by
11 magnets, hook and loop fasteners, non-hardening
12 adhesive, e.g. pressure-sensitive adhesive,
13 interlocking members such as snap connectors, or in
14 other suitable manners as taught in U.S. patents
15 5,799,423, 5,934,707, D385,577 and D458,061. It is
16 also possible to use static cling to mount a polymeric
17 film material as taught in U.S. patent 6,324,777. The
18 teachings of the foregoing patents are incorporated
19 herein by reference.

20 In a further embodiment, the marker elements may
21 comprise three-dimensional bodies or pieces that
22 mechanically interfit with the support substrate. For
23 example, the marker element cross-section may be
24 circular, oval, polygonal, rectangular (including
25 square) or other regular or irregular geometric shapes
26 having multiple faces that are mirror images and
27 configurations that allow the marker element to be
28 mounted in a target location with a selected one of the
29 mirror image faces exposed.

30 Accordingly, the marker elements may be oriented
31 and mounted to the substrate to expose different faces.
32 One of the faces may carry countdown numbers or dates
33 and one or more other faces may carry a text message or

1 a letter, a pictorial design, an image comprising a
2 part of a more comprehensive design or a combination
3 thereof. The marker elements may be removed, rotated
4 or reoriented to change the exposed face and remounted
5 in its date location or moved to a target location.

6 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

7 FIG. 1 is a front elevational view of a Christmas
8 countdown calendar prior to the beginning of the
9 countdown;

10 FIG. 2 is a front elevational view of on an
11 enlarged scale of a marker element shown in FIG. 1;

12 FIG. 3 is a rear elevational view of the marker
13 element shown in FIG. 2;

14 FIG. 4 is a front elevational view of the calendar
15 of FIG. 1 after the countdown is completed and the
16 marker elements have been moved from their date
17 locations to their target locations;

18 FIG. 5 is a front elevational view of a birthday
19 countdown calendar in accordance with a second
20 embodiment of the invention;

21 FIG. 6 is a front elevational view of a Christmas
22 countdown calendar in accordance with a third
23 embodiment of the invention;

24 FIG. 7 is a front perspective view on an enlarged
25 scale of a marker element shown in FIG. 6;

26 FIG. 8 is a rear perspective view of the marker
27 element shown in FIG. 7;

28 FIG. 9 is a fragmentary cross-sectional view on an
29 enlarged scale taken along the line 9-9 in FIG. 6;

30 FIG. 10 is a front elevational view of a marker
31 element shown in FIG. 6; and

1 FIG. 11 is a rear elevational view of the marker
2 element shown in FIG. 10.

3 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

4 Referring to FIG. 1, a countdown calendar 100
5 having a Christmas theme is illustrated. The calendar
6 100 includes a substrate 102 having a design portion
7 104 and a date portion may be formed of non-woven
8 fabric, similar sheet material that may be printed or
9 otherwise marked on a front or display surface 102a
10 with the features of the design and date portions. The
11 design portion 104 includes an illustrative Christmas
12 scene 108 comprising a room having a fireplace 106.
13 The substrate 102 cardboard, plastic or a 110, a
14 Christmas tree 112, a toy train track 114, a room
15 window 116 and a table 118. Of course, other Christmas
16 scenes may be used. In a like manner, design portion
17 scenes related to other calendar themes may be used.
18 For example, a Halloween countdown calendar may include
19 a ghost scene, a Thanksgiving countdown calendar may
20 include a Pilgrim dinner celebration scene and a
21 birthday countdown calendar may include a cake or other
22 birthday celebration indicia. Similar event related
23 scenes may be used in connection with other recognized
24 holidays such as Valentine's Day, New Year's Day,
25 Easter, Independence Day, St. Patrick's Day, Mother's
26 Day, Father's Day, Memorial Day or Labor Day.

27 As shown in FIG. 1, the Christmas scene 108
28 includes number coded target locations 120. A total of
29 24 target locations 120 are contained in the Christmas
30 scene 108. Each of the target locations 120 is number
31 coded 1 through 24. The target locations 120 need not
32 be number coded, but rather, they may be coded with

1 letters, colors, designs, specific shapes or other
2 indicia suitable for recognition by children.

3 The date portion 106 of the calendar 100 comprises
4 a date array 122 formed by a plurality of date
5 locations 124. Each date location 124 includes a
6 square border 126 within which a marker element 128 is
7 temporarily mounting to the front surface 102a of the
8 substrate 102.

9 The date locations 124 may be defined in any
10 convenient manner such as by the use of square borders
11 126, other suitable geometric shapes, color designs or
12 merely numbered. The date array 122 comprises a total
13 of 24 date locations which corresponds with the number
14 of days in the time interval or countdown period. Of
15 course, the number of date locations and the length of
16 the time interval or countdown may be varied. Each of
17 the date locations 124 is number coded 1 through 24 and
18 corresponds with a day of the countdown time interval.
19 The date array 122 comprises four rows 130a, 130b, 130c
20 and 130d of date locations 124. The rows 130a, 130b,
21 130c and 130d respectively contain a total of 4, 5, 6
22 and 9 date locations 124. The configuration of the
23 date array 122 may be varied so as to include arcuate
24 as well as combined arcuate and linear date location
25 alignments. However, vertically spaced horizontal rows
26 are convenient since removal of the marker elements 128
27 reveals a text message.

28 The date marker elements 128 have specific
29 configurations and/or pictorial representations on a
30 front or display side thereof corresponding with
31 additional features or aspects to be added to the
32 design portion 104 to complete or modify the Christmas
33 scene 108. A total of 24 marker elements 128 are

1 provided. The marker elements 128 are number coded 1
2 through 24 so that each marker element is associated
3 with an appropriate date location 124 and, upon
4 repositioning, a proper target location 120 to complete
5 or modify the Christmas scene 108.

6 Referring to FIGS. 2 and 3, the marker element 128
7 associated with date location 1 is shown and referred
8 to as marker element "I" herein. The marker element 1
9 has a front surface 1a and a back surface 1b. The
10 front surface 1a is decorated to depict a mouse hole
11 that is to be added to the Christmas scene 108. The
12 back surface 1b is marked with the particular element
13 number, i.e., "1" herein as shown at "A", and has a
14 hook fastener 132 secured thereto.

15 For purposes of removably mounting the marker
16 elements 128 to the front face 102a of the substrate
17 102, each of the date locations 124 and target
18 locations 120 has a loop fastener 134 secured to the
19 front face 102a in any suitable manner such as by
20 adhesive or sewing. Accordingly, the marker elements
21 128 may be moved between their date locations 124 and
22 target locations 120 by disengaging the hook fasteners
23 132 from the loop fasteners 134 at the date locations
24 124 and reengaging the hook fasteners 132 with the loop
25 fasteners 134 at the target locations 120. It should
26 be appreciated that the non-woven fabric forming the
27 substrate 102 may be of sufficiently loose construction
28 to provide the loop function and enable the elimination
29 of the loop fasteners 134.

30 At the completion of the countdown, all of the
31 marker elements 128 have been moved from their date
32 locations 124 to the target locations 120 and the
33 Christmas scene 108 has been completed and the calendar

1 100 appears as shown in FIG. 4. A text message "Twas
2 the Night Before Christmas" appears at the date portion
3 106 and the Christmas scene 108 in the design portion
4 104 is modified or completed.

5 Referring to FIG. 5, a further embodiment of a
6 countdown calendar 200 is shown. For convenience, the
7 same reference numerals as used in the description of
8 the prior embodiment will be used herein with the
9 addition of 100.

10 In this instance, the calendar 200 includes a
11 substrate 202 having a design portion 204 and a date
12 portion 206. The calendar 200 relates to a birthday,
13 and the design portion 204 depicts a birthday
14 celebration scene 208 including a cake 210.

15 As shown in FIG. 5, the birthday scene 208
16 includes number coded target locations 220 arranged in
17 an array on the cake 210. In this embodiment, the
18 marker elements 228 are moved during the countdown to
19 complete the pictorial design of the birthday scene 208
20 and also to form a birthday greeting. For convenience,
21 all of the marker elements 228 are shown in their
22 target locations 220 except for the elements "22", "23"
23 and "24" which are in their date locations 224.

24 Alternatively, it should be appreciated that a
25 chart may be provided on the back side of the
26 substrates 102 and 202 showing each of the marker
27 elements and its corresponding number, color or other
28 code to be used in positioning the element at the
29 proper date and target locations.

30 Referring to FIG. 6, a countdown calendar 300
31 having a Christmas theme is illustrated. The calendar
32 300 includes a substrate 302 having a design portion
33 304 and a date portion 306. A front or display surface

1 302a of the substrate 302 is marked with various
2 pictorial or text features in the design and date
3 portions.

4 In this instance, the substrate 302 is formed of a
5 more rigid material such as wood, plastic or a similar
6 material that is sufficiently rigid to have mounting
7 cavities or recesses 303 formed therein for receiving
8 and mounting the marker elements 328 as described
9 below. For example, the substrate 302 and marker
10 elements 328 may be formed of wood. It is also
11 possible to form the substrate 302 of a plastic sheet
12 material that may be thermoformed or vacuum formed to
13 provide the recesses 303 and, similarly, the same
14 plastic material may be used to form the
15 three-dimensional bodies of the marker elements 328.
16 Suitable plastics include acrylonitrile-butadiene
17 styrene, high impact polystyrene, polyethylene,
18 polyvinylchloride and acrylic.

19 The design portion 304 includes an illustrative
20 Christmas tree scene 308 comprising a Christmas tree
21 312. In this embodiment, the date portion 306 includes
22 a text message by 314. For illustration, the marker
23 elements 328 for date locations 324 numbered 1 through
24 10 are shown in their reverse or message positions in
25 date locations 320. That is, upon expiration of days 1
26 through 10, the marker elements 328 have been reversed
27 sequentially during the countdown so as to show that
28 text message "Santa Claus".

29 On the other hand, none of the marker elements 328
30 in the date locations 324 numbered 11 through 15 have
31 been moved to their target locations 320 on the
32 Christmas tree 312. Accordingly, the recesses 303 are
33 visible.

1 Referring to FIGS. 7 and 8, the marker element 328
2 corresponding with the number "1" date location 324 is
3 shown. As shown, the marker element 1 has a cubic
4 shape including a first face 1a having a Christmas
5 candle 336 decoration or design. At the end of the
6 first day, the marker element 1 is withdrawn from the
7 recess 303 at the date location 324, rotated and
8 reinserted in the recess so as to expose a second face
9 1b bearing the letter "S".

10 The marker element 328 may have a thickness
11 dimension extending between the faces 1a and 1b
12 substantially equal to the depth of the recess 303 so
13 that the calendar is assembled to a flat or planar
14 condition similar to a jigsaw puzzle. For younger
15 children, the marker element 328 may have a thickness
16 dimension greater than the depth of the recess 303 to
17 permit gripping the element during removal from the
18 recess.

19 Referring to FIG. 9, the substrate 302 has a
20 thickness extending between the front surface 302a and
21 the rear surface 302b. The recess 303 has a depth
22 equal to about of the thickness of the substrate 302a.
23 The marker element 328 has a thickness extending
24 between faces 1a and 1b that is greater than the depth
25 of the recess 303, however, it may be similarly
26 dimensioned.

27 Referring to FIGS. 10 and 11, the marker element
28 328 corresponding with the number "15" date location
29 324 is shown. As shown, a first face 15a of the number
30 15 marker element includes a Christmas wreath 338. A
31 second face 15b includes a Christmas tree 340.
32 Accordingly, the marker element 15 may be moved from
33 its date location to the target location 320 numbered

1 15 shown on the Christmas tree 312 with either the
2 Christmas wreath 338 or Christmas tree 340 shown as a
3 decorative feature of the Christmas tree 312.

4 It should be appreciated that each of the marker
5 elements 328 may be provided with a different geometric
6 shape. For example, the marker elements may be shape
7 or provided with peripheral or side configurations in
8 the thickness direction such that each marker element
9 fits in only one recess at the date location and only
10 one recess at the target location. Accordingly, there
11 would be no need to number or otherwise code the marker
12 elements and corresponding date and/or target
13 locations.

14 While the invention has been shown and described
15 with respect to particular embodiments thereof, this is
16 for the purpose of illustration rather than limitation,
17 and other variations and modifications of the specific
18 embodiments herein shown and described will be apparent
19 to those skilled in the art all within the intended
20 spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, the
21 patent is not to be limited in scope and effect to the
22 specific embodiments herein shown and described nor in
23 any other way that is inconsistent with the extent to
24 which the progress in the art has been advanced by the
25 invention.